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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at William Rainey Harper college (WRHC) in Illinois to provide basic institutional data about student performance over time. Data were obtained on performance and achievement at WRHC by following samples of 200 full-time and 200 part-time students in successive classes between 1974 and 1984. Study findings revealed: (1) the average grade point average ranged from 2.6 to 2.4, rising and falling in direct relationship to grading policy; (2) the average full-time student accumulated 45 hours while attending WRHC for 4.8 semesters, and 37% earned a degree or certificate; (3) the average part-time student accumulated 18 hours while attending WRHC almost 4 semesters, and about 12% achieved a degree or certificate; (4) older students who enrolled beyond two semesters were more likely to persist to graduation than younger students; (5) only approximately 9% of the students transferred credit hours from another college, even though 35% to 40% had attended another college prior to entering WRHC; (6) almost one fourth of the full-time students and one third of the part-time students eventually enrolled in both degree credit and continuing education offerings at the college; and (7) similar to national trends, the American College Testing program composite scores of entering students dropped over the years even though students' high school class rank remained constant. (Author/MPH)

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William Rainey Harper College

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Longitudinal Study of Performance of Students Entering Harper College, 1974-1984

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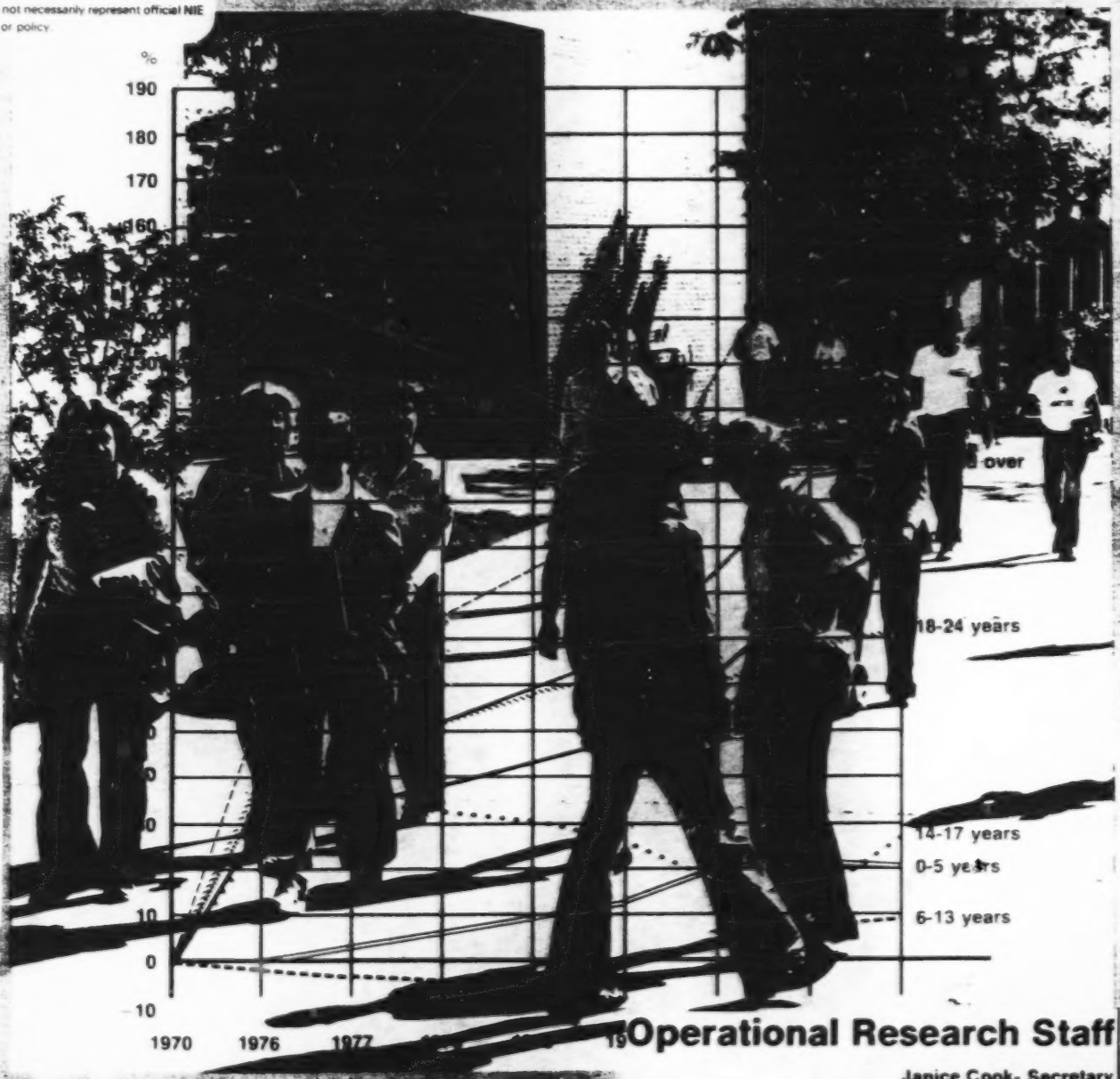
Director

Office of Planning and Research



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ABSTRACT

THIS STUDY FOLLOWED SAMPLES OF SUCCESSIVE CLASSES (1974-1984) OF 200 FULL-TIME AND 200 PART-TIME STUDENTS EACH YEAR IN A LONGITUDINAL MANNER. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY WAS TO PROVIDE SOME BASIC INSTITUTIONAL DATA ABOUT STUDENT PERFORMANCE OVER TIME. DATA WAS OBTAINED ON THEIR PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT AT HARPER THROUGH ANALYSIS OF THE ACADEMIC RECORDS OF EACH OF THE STUDENTS SAMPLED.

OVER THE YEARS THE GRADE POINT AVERAGE OF A STUDENT HAS RISEN AND FALLEN IN DIRECT RELATIONSHIP TO CHANGES IN THE GRADING POLICY. IN YEARS WHEN POLICIES WERE MOST FAVORABLE TO STUDENTS, THE AVERAGE GPA REACHED OVER 2.6 WHILE IN RECENT YEARS, THEY HAVE RETURNED TO THE 2.40 LEVEL. IT WAS ALSO NOTED OLDER STUDENTS ACHIEVE A MUCH HIGHER GPA THAN YOUNGER STUDENTS.

PERSISTENCE HAS REMAINED FAIRLY CONSTANT OVER THE YEARS. THE AVERAGE FULL-TIME STUDENT WILL ACCUMULATE 45 HOURS WHILE AT HARPER 4.8 SEMESTERS, AND 37 PERCENT WILL EARN A DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE. THE AVERAGE PART-TIME STUDENT WILL ACCUMULATE 18 HOURS AND ATTEND ALMOST 4 SEMESTERS AT HARPER, AND ABOUT 12 PERCENT OF THESE STUDENTS WILL ACHIEVE A DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE AT HARPER. OLDER STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO STAY ONLY A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AT HARPER AS MANY HAVE ONLY SHORT-TERM GOALS. HOWEVER, OF THOSE WHO DO STAY BEYOND TWO SEMESTERS, OLDER STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO PERSIST TO GRADUATION.

ONLY ABOUT 9 PERCENT OF THE STUDENTS ACTUALLY TRANSFER CREDIT HOURS FROM ANOTHER COLLEGE INTO HARPER EVEN THOUGH 35 TO 40 PERCENT HAVE ATTENDED ANOTHER COLLEGE PRIOR TO HARPER. SOME DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS CONTINUE TO ENROLL IN CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSES UP TO TEN YEARS AFTER FIRST BEGINNING AT HARPER. EVENTUALLY ALMOST A FOURTH OF THE FULL-TIME STUDENTS AND A THIRD OF THE PART-TIME STUDENTS ENROLL IN BOTH DEGREE CREDIT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION OFFERINGS AT HARPER. IN THE VAST MAJORITY OF CASES, STUDENTS ARE FIRST ATTRACTED BY DEGREE CREDIT COURSES AND THEN LATER ENROLL IN CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSES. SIMILAR TO THE NATIONAL TRENDS, THE ACT COMPOSITE SCORES OF ENTERING STUDENTS HAVE BEEN DROPPING OVER THE YEARS EVEN THOUGH THEIR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS RANK HAS REMAINED CONSTANT.

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Purpose

The purpose of this study is to follow samples of beginning full-time and part-time traditional credit students over a long period of time observing their performance and achievements at Harper College. This type of longitudinal study provides the answer to such questions as: What percentage of all full-time students starting at Harper will ever graduate or accumulate 36 hours of credit or attend four semesters or will take continuing education courses? The same questions can be answered about beginning part-time students. Other questions can also be answered such as their GPA, whether they have transferred into Harper, their age and their standing in their high school graduating class.

Population Surveyed

A random sample of 200 full-time and 200 part-time beginning traditional credit students has been gathered from the population of students entering each fall from 1967 to 1984. This report shows only students who have entered from fall of 1974 to fall of 1984.

Method Used

Transcript data have been gathered on all students in the target samples and the data analyzed. The data was first separated by full time and part time by the year the student started at Harper. A further separation was carried out by age on the GPA analysis.

Discussion of Results

There have been three policy decisions which have affected the grade point average of students over the years. The first occurred in 1972 when students were able to repeat failed courses and replace the old D or F with the new grade rather than just averaging it in. The second policy change came in 1974 and allowed faculty to give N grades rather than Fs to students who simply did not attend. The third policy change occurred in the fall of 1982 when the College dropped the N grade. The following table shows the average grade point of students in these four periods of time.

Student started as a:	Before Policy Changes 1967-1971	Repeat and Replacement of Grade Policy Instituted 1972-1973	N Grade Instituted 1974-1981	N Grade Dropped 1982-1983
Full-time Student	1.95	2.31	2.61	2.38
Part-time Student	2.25	2.29	2.73	2.43

This table shows the grade point average was affected drastically by the N grade policy. When it was instituted in 1974, GPA rose dramatically and when the use of N grades was stopped in the fall of 1982, GPA dropped dramatically. The repeat and grade replacement policy instituted in 1972 affected primarily full-time students who would stay around long enough to repeat courses and replace low grades.

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Discussion of Results (continued)

Grade average is also greatly affected by the age of the students when they enter Harper. For example, full-time students entering before they are 21 average 2.55 while full-time students entering after they are 21 or older average 2.97. Part-time students who enter while they are under 21 average 2.24. Those between 21 and 34 average 2.89 and those 35 or older average 2.98.

Persistence rates have remained fairly constant over the years. About 65 percent of students who start full time one fall return the next fall. Among part-time students since 1974 about 38 percent have returned one year later. Many community college students follow stop-out patterns of in and out of college. Thus we find over 14 percent of students who start full time do not return one year later but return at a later time. This percentage for part-timers is about seventeen.

Part-time students average about 3.8 semesters attended during their history at Harper while students starting full time will average 4.8 semesters attended. Interestingly, 18 percent of students starting part time attend seven or more semesters at Harper while more than 21 percent of those starting full time will attend Harper seven or more semesters. The term "a two-year college" seems to be a misnomer. Past studies have shown that older students are much more likely to stay only a short time (2 semesters or less) mainly because they had only short-term goals.

Students starting as full-time students will eventually complete about 45 credit hours on the average, while the average student starting part time will complete about 18 credit hours at Harper. Over the years about 37 percent of all persons starting as full-time students will eventually achieve a degree or certificate at Harper. Moreover, over half will achieve almuni status (48 hours or degree or certificate). Among those starting as part-time students, the percentage graduating dips to 12 percent while 16 percent reached alumni status. There seems to be no trend in these percentages over the years. Past studies have shown that older students once they get beyond the first year are more likely than younger students to persist to graduation.

There seems to be no trend over the years in the percent of students who officially transfer credits from other colleges to Harper. Since 1974 about 9 percent of the full-time students and about 9½ percent of the part-time students transfer credits to Harper. To put this in perspective, it is known from other studies that 35-40 percent of Harper's students have attended some other college previously. Thus many students who have attended a college prior to enrolling at Harper choose not to transfer their credits in to Harper. Other research studies have shown older students are more apt to transfer in credit hours than younger students but this would be expected as older students have had more opportunities to attend other colleges before coming to Harper.

Degree credit students continue to enroll in continuing education offerings long after they first begin at Harper. By the time ten years have passed, 24 percent of the full-time degree-credit students and one third of the part-time degree-credit students have also enrolled in continuing education courses. It seems very evident that degree credit offerings are much more likely to first attract students than are continuing education offerings. For example, after ten years among full-time degree-credit students who have also taken continuing education courses, 93 percent took degree credit courses first. Similarly, among part-time degree-credit students who also enrolled in continuing education offerings, two thirds enrolled in degree credit courses first.

Discussion of Results (continued)

The average age of entering full-time students is 19 and for entering part-time students it is just over 26. The average school rank for both full-time and part-time students is about the 62nd percentile. Consistent with nationwide trends, ACT scores of entering students have been falling over the years. In the early '70s, the mean ACT composite was 19.0 for both full-time and part-time students, but this has fallen to 17.7 in recent years for full-time students and even lower for part-time students - 15.8.

Major Conclusions

Over the years the grade point average of a student has risen and fallen in direct relationship to changes in the grading policy. In years when policies were most favorable to students, the average GPA reached over 2.6 while in recent years, they have returned to the 2.40 level. It was also noted older students achieve a much higher GPA than younger students.

Persistence has remained fairly constant over the years. The average full-time student will accumulate 45 hours while at Harper 4.8 semesters, and 37 percent will earn a degree or certificate. The average part-time student will accumulate 18 hours and attend almost 4 semesters at Harper, and about 12 percent of these students will achieve a degree or certificate at Harper. Older students are more likely to stay only a short period of time at Harper as many have only short-term goals. However, of those who do stay beyond two semesters, older students are more likely to persist to graduation.

Only about 9 percent of the students actually transfer credit hours from another college into Harper even though 35 to 40 percent have attended some other college prior to Harper. Some degree credit students continue to enroll in continuing education courses up to ten years after first beginning at Harper. Eventually almost a fourth of the full-time students and a third of the part-time students enroll in both degree credit and continuing education offerings at Harper. In the vast majority of cases students are first attracted by degree credit courses and then later enroll in continuing education courses. Similar to the national trends, the ACT composite scores of entering students have been dropping over the years even though their high school class rank has remained constant.

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF FULL-TIME DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER

	Students beginning in the fall of:										
	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Sample Size	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Mean GPA	2.60	2.63	2.64	2.64	2.68	2.58	2.56	2.58	2.20	2.45	2.48
Mean Cumulative Hours Attempted	46.98	44.06	44.26	46.38	47.75	46.39	49.58	45.77	42.60	39.96	25.99
Mean Cumulative Hours Passed	46.05	43.10	42.93	45.32	47.10	45.38	47.16	43.58	38.82	37.73	24.68
Percent Registered 1 year later	68.5	60.0	59.5	60.5	65.0	65.0	68.0	67.0	70.5	65.0	69.5
Percent not Registered 1 year later but who return another time	13.5	14.5	16.0	16.0	12.0	12.0	15.5	9.0	11.0	9.5	0
Percent who never return after first year	18.0	25.5	24.5	23.5	23.0	23.0	16.5	24.0	18.5	25.5	30.5
Average number of semesters registered	5.0	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.7	5.0	4.7	4.4	3.8	2.2
Percent Registering for:											
One Semester	4.5	7.0	4.5	4.5	6.0	5.5	4.5	3.5	8.0	5.5	8.5
Two Semesters	15.5	18.0	17.0	17.0	16.0	16.0	9.0	19.0	12.5	19.0	66.0
Three Semesters	9.5	13.0	17.0	13.5	7.5	10.5	12.0	11.0	15.0	12.0	25.5
Four Semesters	20.5	14.5	14.5	15.0	15.0	16.0	18.5	14.0	15.0	33.0	0
Five Semesters	14.0	17.0	18.5	16.0	18.5	20.0	14.0	19.5	13.0	17.5	0
Six Semesters	13.5	13.5	10.0	11.5	14.0	12.5	17.5	14.0	20.5	13.0	0
Seven or More Semesters	22.5	17.0	18.5	22.5	23.0	19.5	24.5	19.0	16.0	0	0

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF FULL-TIME CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER

	Students beginning in the fall of:										
	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Under 24 Hours	18.5	20.5	20.0	19.0	15.0	24.5	14.0	24.0	26.0	23.0	34.0
24 - 35 Hours - No Degree	18.0	23.0	25.5	20.5	18.5	14.5	19.0	18.0	18.5	26.5	64.0
36 - 47 Hours - No Degree	9.0	7.5	8.0	6.5	13.5	10.0	8.5	11.5	14.5	9.5	1.5
48 Hours or More - No Degree	15.0	12.5	17.0	14.0	16.5	13.5	20.0	18.5	19.5	24.0	0
48 Hours or More with Degree	37.0	32.0	26.0	37.5	33.5	36.0	32.5	26.5	19.0	13.5	0
Less than 48 Hours with Degree	1.0	3.0	.5	1.5	1.5	.5	3.0	.5	0	2.0	0
Certificate Only	1.5	1.5	3.0	1.0	1.5	1.0	3.0	1.0	2.5	1.5	.5
Percent Transferring into Harper Officially	9.5	14.0	6.5	9.0	7.0	6.5	12.5	8.5	9.0	5.5	2.5
Percent taking Continuing Education Courses	24.5	23.5	22.5	20.5	16.0	14.0	12.5	11.5	5.0	3.0	3.5
Percent taking Degree Credit Courses First	23.0	21.5	19.5	17.5	11.5	12.0	11.5	8.5	5.0	1.5	2.5
Percent taking Continuing Education Courses First	.5	2.0	1.5	1.5	0	.5	.5	2.0	0	.5	0
Percent taking them Simultaneously	1.0	0	1.5	1.5	4.5	1.0	.5	1.0	0	1.0	1.0
Mean Age	18.7	19.3	18.7	18.7	18.1	18.4	18.7	18.4	18.4	18.5	18.1
Sample Size Age	194	179	194	192	190	194	196	197	198	197	200
Mean High School Rank	62.0	59.5	63.1	63.8	63.7	63.0	64.9	59.4	58.2	60.9	58.3
Sample Size Rank	161	166	167	189	165	156	168	184	179	177	161
Mean ACT Composite	19.0	18.9	18.9	18.2	18.2	17.4	18.9	17.3	16.5	17.9	17.6
Sample Size ACT	47	111	55	110	46	43	88	125	111	75	80

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF PART-TIME CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER

	Students beginning in the fall of:										
	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Sample Size	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Mean GPA	2.87	2.64	2.65	2.75	2.95	2.68	2.62	2.70	2.25	2.45	2.58
Mean Cumulative Hours Attempted	15.72	17.51	21.61	21.05	21.22	18.27	18.83	19.04	15.49	13.50	9.82
Mean Cumulative Hours Passed	15.22	16.61	20.52	20.41	20.23	17.53	17.36	17.60	13.56	12.13	9.02
Percent Registered 1 year later	32.0	32.0	39.0	36.5	43.5	41.5	37.5	44.5	40.0	38.0	32.5
Percent not Registered 1 year later but who return another time	16.0	17.5	15.5	17.0	18.5	19.0	16.0	10.5	8.0	4.0	0
Percent who never return after first year	52.0	50.5	45.5	46.5	38.0	39.5	46.5	45.0	52.0	58.0	67.5
Average number of semesters registered	3.50	3.7	4.1	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.5	2.7	2.3	1.7
Percent Registering for:											
One Semester	34.0	28.0	21.0	30.5	21.0	21.5	26.0	24.5	32.5	43.5	41.5
Two Semesters	24.5	23.5	28.0	20.0	19.5	21.5	19.0	23.0	27.5	20.5	51.0
Three Semesters	10.0	14.0	11.5	10.5	17.5	18.0	16.0	12.0	8.5	10.5	7.5
Four Semesters	5.5	6.5	8.5	8.5	11.5	10.5	10.0	11.0	9.5	16.0	0
Five Semesters	4.0	5.5	5.0	4.0	5.5	6.0	6.0	9.5	7.0	7.0	0
Six Semesters	5.5	3.5	8.5	4.0	8.5	6.5	6.0	6.5	8.0	2.5	0
Seven or More Semesters	16.5	19.5	17.5	22.5	16.5	16.0	17.0	13.5	7.0	0	0

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF PART-TIME CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER

	Students beginning in the fall of:										
	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Under 24 Hours - No Degree	61.0	54.5	49.5	53.5	48.5	54.5	52.5	55.0	63.5	68.5	70.0
12 - 23 Hours - No Degree	14.0	22.5	20.5	18.5	22.0	18.0	21.0	19.5	17.0	13.5	23.0
24 - 35 Hours - No Degree	9.0	6.5	8.5	4.5	6.0	9.0	7.5	6.5	6.0	6.0	6.0
36 - 47 Hours - No Degree	1.5	3.0	3.0	4.5	7.0	3.5	4.5	5.5	2.0	4.5	0
48 Hours or More - No Degree	1.5	3.0	7.0	5.5	6.5	2.5	6.0	5.5	5.0	3.5	0
48 Hours or More with Degree	7.0	6.0	8.5	10.0	5.5	7.0	3.5	5.5	4.0	0	0
Less than 48 hours with Degree	3.5	1.5	1.5	2.0	1.5	2.5	1.5	0	.5	4.0	.5
Certificate Only	2.5	3.0	1.5	1.5	3.0	3.0	3.5	2.5	2.0	0	.5
Percent Transferring into Harper Officially	15.0	9.0	9.0	10.5	7.0	11.5	7.5	10.0	9.0	7.0	3.0
Percent taking Continuing Education courses	33.0	32.5	24.0	34.5	27.5	32.0	18.5	24.5	13.5	19.0	2.5
Percent taking Degree Credit Courses First	20.5	23.0	20.0	18.0	23.5	23.5	13.0	14.0	10.5	7.0	0
Percent taking Continuing Education Courses First	10.5	7.5	1.5	4.0	1.0	2.5	2.0	7.5	1.0	9.0	0
Percent taking them Simultaneously	2.0	2.0	2.5	12.5	3.0	6.0	3.5	3.0	2.0	3.0	2.5
Mean Age	28.4	26.6	25.6	26.9	25.6	25.7	25.9	24.8	25.4	26.6	24.3
Sample Size Age	197	168	183	189	183	192	194	184	197	192	199
Mean High School Rank	65.0	60.7	62.5	66.3	65.2	63.2	60.6	63.4	62.2	62.9	53.0
Sample Size Rank	153	156	171	183	155	144	148	164	171	134	140
Mean ACT Composite	20.3	17.4	15.4	17.3	16.3	16.2	14.5	15.8	15.0	16.4	15.5
Sample Size ACT	3	22	12	29	14	9	21	39	27	19	24

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

GPA vs AGE

OF ENTERING STUDENTS

	Full-Time STudents Beginning 1974-1984			Part-Time Students Beginning 1974-1984			
	Under 21	21 and Older	Age Unknown	Under 21	21-34 Years of Age	35 and Older	Age Unknown
N	2001	130	69	888	825	363	121
Mean GPA	2.55	2.97	2.64	2.24	2.89	2.98	2.56

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